

# INTERCONNECTIVITY

## UNDERSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH FROM A FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVE

To protect our health it is best to prevent toxins from entering our environments in the first place.



*Mother Earth*, acrylic on canvas, Norval Morrisseau, 1985.  
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In a First Nations worldview, interconnectivity is an understanding of the relationships and interdependence between all living and non-living things. It is a belief that we are connected across time to those who came before us and those yet to come, and that we are part of the natural world.

In western science, ecology and earth sciences study the interconnectedness of components in the environment. A good example of interconnectivity in western science is 'biomagnification'. It is the result of bioaccumulation, or the buildup of toxins in the bodies of living things. Part of what makes toxins dangerous is that they are often difficult for our ecosystems and bodies to get rid of.

For example, mercury is a toxic substance that can collect and be stored in fat. Mercury enters water and gets into the aquatic food web, with bigger and older fish collecting the highest levels. When humans, birds or other animals eat these fish, the toxin can collect in their fat. In mammals such as humans, these toxins can then be passed onto babies through breast milk.

### What we do to the earth - we ultimately do to ourselves

Environmental Health refers to the **relationship** between our well-being and the indoor and outdoor environments in which we live. Environmental health is part of public health and focuses on preventing disease and creating health-supportive environments.

First Nations approach environmental health in a holistic manner that includes the welfare of all living things and physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of health.



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FIRST NATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL  
HEALTH INNOVATION NETWORK

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